

Sure-Fit Designs™

Sewing Terminology: What does it all mean?



Sewing Glossary & Terminology

When you're not sure what a sewing term means, just look it up in this handy sewing terminology glossary.

Glenda the Good Stitch

Sure-Fit Designs™

Sewing Glossary and Terminology

Backstitch: One or two stitches back and forth at the start and end of a seam. Also known as back-tacking. Backstitching keeps the stitches anchored so the seam doesn't come apart.

Ballpoint Needle: A sewing machine needle with a rounded tip that stitches knit fabrics without splitting the fabric.

Baste: Long stitches to temporarily hold fabric pieces together during construction. Made by either hand sewing or machine, the ends are not backstitched and the stitches are later removed.

Bias: Diagonal direction of the fabric between the lengthwise grain and crosswise grain. True bias is at a 45 degree angle.

Bias Tape: Strips of fabric that have been cut on the bias. Used for binding and facing seams. Also known as bias binding.

Binding: A way to finish the raw edge of a garment by attaching bias tape.

Body Blueprint: A basic pattern usually sewn from muslin from which other patterns can be designed. A custom sloper is made to your specific measurements and can be used to design well fitting garments. See "Sloper".

Bobbin: A small, round spool that holds the thread that becomes the underside of machine stitching.

Bolt: A unit of fabric as sold in fabric stores. Usually on a roll or folded over cardboard and labeled with information such as fabric content and care instructions.



Boning: Plastic or steel strips slipped into sheaths that are sewn into a garment to give support and body contouring. Also known as stays or steels.

Casing: A flat open tube of fabric through which tape, elastic, or trim can be inserted.

Clip: To cut into a seam allowance in order to mark a placement or to allow a curve to open up and lay flat and smooth.

Crosswise Grain: The fabric threads that run across from selvage to selvage. Also known as weft.

Dart: A 'V' shaped, tapered fold stitched into a garment to allow the fabric to shape the contours of the body.



Drape: The way the fabric hangs on the body or dress form.

Drawstring: A cord or ribbon inserted through a hem or casing.

Dress Form: A torso shaped frame used to fit garments during the construction process.

Ease: 1. An additional space allowance added to a pattern for movement in a garment. 2. A way of sewing a length of fabric into a bit of a smaller space without resulting in gathers or puckers.

Edge Stitching: A row of stitching along the very edge of a garment or fold in a project, usually about 1/8" (0.3cm) from the folded or seamed edge.

Elastic Thread: Thin, stretchy polyester-wrapped thread used to make stretchable Shirred fabric.

Eyelet: A small hole made in the fabric, usually finished with a buttonhole stitch or grommet.

Facing: Fabric sewn on the raw edge of a garment piece that is turned under and serves as a finish for the edge as well. Sometimes a separate piece is not needed and the fabric pattern piece is simply folded over on itself to create the facing.



Fastener: Any method of closing a garment, such as a button, zipper, snap, hook and eye or Velcro.

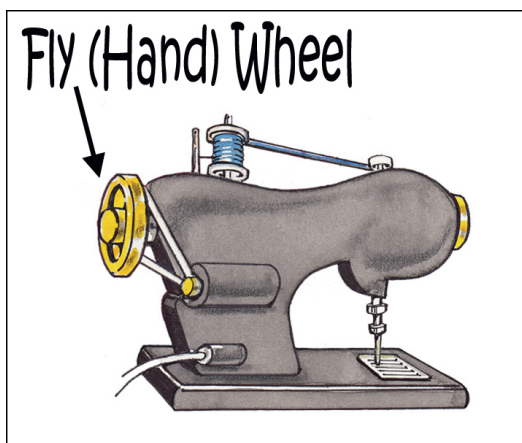
Feed Dogs: The “teeth” under the plate on the sewing machine that move the fabric along as it is sewn.

Finger Press: Using the pressure of your fingers to press a seam open or make a fold.

Finish: Turning under a raw edge and stitching in place. Also can be done by serging/overlocking the raw edge.

Flat Felled Seam: The creation of a seam by sewing the wrong sides together first, then trimming one side of the seam allowance close to the seam before turning the other seam allowance under and top stitching it over the first.

Fly Wheel: The wheel on the machine that raises and lowers the sewing machine needle. Also known as the hand wheel.



Fold Line: A way of positioning a pattern piece on the fold of the fabric so that a center seam is not needed.

Fray: The loose threads on the edge of a fabric.

Free Arm: A removable base on most sewing machines that allows easier sewing of cuffs, armholes, hems of pants.

French Seam: A completely enclosed seam. First stitched wrong sides together, then turned in and stitched with the right sides together so the raw edges are enclosed in the seam. Often found in high quality garments or garments made with sheer fabrics.

Frog Closure: A button-like closure using a loop instead of a buttonhole for a garment. Usually ornamental and made from silk ribbons or cords.

Fuse: To bond two surfaces together with fusible tape or fusible webbing.

Fusible Tape or Webbing: A heat-activated adhesive used to bond fabrics. i.e Stitch Witchery or Heat & Bond

Gather: To draw up a fabric by pulling up rows of basting stitches in order to make it fit in a smaller area such as a sleeve into an armhole or a skirt into a waistband.

Godet: A triangular piece of fabric used as an insert in the seam to provide freedom of movement or to enlarge a sleeve opening. Godets add flare and volume. Typically used in dresses and skirts.

Grade: 1. Trimming one layer at a narrower width to reduce bulk in the seam allowance. The narrowest seam edge should be closest to the body as a general rule. 2. A way of altering a pattern to make it fit a smaller or larger size.

Grain: The direction of the threads in the fabric. The lengthwise grain runs parallel to the selvage and is stronger and less stretchy. The crosswise grain runs horizontally to the selvage and often has some stretch/give.

Grommet: A reinforced eyelet usually covered with vinyl or metal. Used for lacing and decorative purposes.

Grosgrain Ribbon: Heavy corded ribbon that has a tight, horizontal ribbed appearance.

Hand Wheel: The wheel that raises and lowers the sewing machine needle. Also known as the Fly Wheel.

Hem: To finish the raw edge of a fabric by neatly folding it over and stitching it down.



Hem Line: The line on the pattern that shows where the finished hem level will be.

Hong Kong Binding: Enclosing a seam with bias binding.

Hook & Eye Closure: A small metal hook on one side and a loop (either metal or fabric) on the other side of an opening in a garment. Often used at the upper back/neck of dresses in lingerie.

Interfacing: A textile used on the wrong side of the fabric to give support and help shape or stabilize where desired. Interfacing is either sewn in or fusible (fused on). Found in collars, cuffs, waistbands, facings and sometimes pockets.

Interlining: An added layer fabric between the facing and lining of a garment for added warmth.

Jacquard: A fabric which is made using a special loom that creates an intricately woven design.

Jeans Needle: A strong needle for heavyweight fabrics (like denim) with a larger eye to accommodate thicker thread.

Knit: A fabric consisting of interlocking loops creating a stretchy fabric.

Lengthwise Grain: The grain of the fabric where the threads run parallel to the selvages. Also known as the warp.

Lining: Usually made of a slick/slippy fabric and used to finish the inside of a garment. A lining hides the seams and allows for the garment to slip on easily. Lining is cut from the same pattern pieces as the garment.



Machine Basting: A basting stitch done using the longest stitch possible on the machine. See "Baste".

Muslin: Cotton, woven fabric made in various weights that's often used to test sewing patterns.

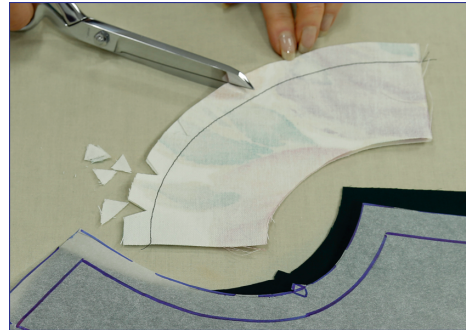
Nap: The "fuzzy" (pile) side of a fabric that is directional in nature. Velvet and corduroy are good examples. Pattern pieces must all be laid out and cut in the same direction as the nap to ensure a consistent look.

Needle Plate: Also called the Throat Plate. Found at the base of the machine, under the pressure foot. It has the seam allowance markings engraved in it.

Nonwoven: Fabric-like material made from fibers bonded together by a chemical or heat process such as felt. Also any fabric not made with thread or yarn such as leather or suede.

Notches: A triangular marking on a pattern used to line up two or more pattern pieces to be joined together. There are single up to quadruple notches.

Notching: Removing a small triangular shaped piece from the seam allowance to reduce bulk when the seam is turned.



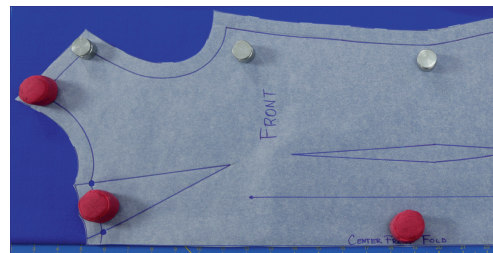
Notions: A term used for sewing accessories other than the fabric and machine. Thread, scissors, pins, seam rippers, etc.

One Way Design: A directional pattern on some printed fabric which requires special attention in laying out the pattern pieces so that the pattern is facing the same direction.

Overcast: Machine or hand stitching done over a seam to prevent raveling.

Overlock (Serge): An overcast stitch on a special machine to prevent raveling of the fabric. Edges can be trimmed and overcast with thread in one operation.

Pattern Weights: Small weights used in place of pinning to hold the pattern pieces down on the fabric while cutting.



Pile: See "Nap".

Pinking Shears: Shears with notched edges used for finishing the edges of fabric with a zigzag cut. Used for prevention of raveling and also used for decoration.

Pintuck: A series of narrowly sewn rows of fabric that give a decorative raised look to a garment. Sometimes used on the bodice of blouses to give a tailored look.

Piping Cord: A cord covered in fabric used to create a decorative trim.



Pivot: A method of changing the stitching direction at a corner by stopping with the needle in the down position in the fabric at the pivot point, raising the presser foot and turning the fabric around the needle to the new sewing position. Then lower the pressure foot and continue to sew.

Placket: A finished opening found on shirt fronts, sleeve cuffs, skirt openings, dresses, and pants that is made to accommodate buttons, snaps and other fasteners.

Pleat: A fold in fabric that is either inverted or folded outward and only sewn on the top edge providing fullness and decoration. Often on the waistbands of skirts or trousers.

Press: Using an iron in an up and down motion on a section of fabric without sliding the iron.

Presser Foot: The part of the sewing machine that holds the fabric in place as it is being sewn and fed through by the feed dogs.

Pressing Ham: A tightly stuff ham shaped pillow used to press curved seams and darts. See "Tailor's Ham".



Raglan: A sleeve with a seam that runs diagonally down from the neckline to the underarm. It is made separately and then attached to the garment.

Raw Edge: The unfinished edge of a fabric.

Ribbing: A stretchy, knit fabric trim used for cuffs, necklines and waistbands on knit shirts.

Right Side: The design or finished side of the fabric. Some fabrics have no right or wrong side.

Rise: The distance between the crotch and waistband in trousers, shorts and underwear.

Rotary Cutter: A tool with a sharp, circular blade for cutting layers of fabric.



Rotary Cutting Mat: A cutting mat made of special self sealing material to be placed under fabric when using a rotary cutter so as not to damage the cutting table.

Ruching: Gathering the fabric, usually in a seam to provide fullness, accent, or decoration.

Ruffle: A strip of fabric that is gathered to create fullness, like a flounce on a skirt.

Running Stitch: A basic hand stitch that runs over and under the fabric. Often used for basting.

Seam: The join where two pieces of fabric are sewn together.

Seam Allowance: The amount of fabric between the cut edge and the line of stitching. Usually 5/8" (1.6cm).

Seam Roll: A very tightly stuffed sausage shaped roll for pressing seam allowances open.



Selvage: The tightly woven edge of fabric along the lengthwise grain which generally does not fray due to the manufacturer's finish. Often marked with information from the manufacturer.

Serge: To finish the edges of a fabric with a serger.

Set-in Sleeve: A separately made sleeve joined to the body of a garment by a seam that starts at the underarm and continues all the way around the armhole.

Shank Button: A button with space between the button and fabric. The button has an extension on the underside which the thread passes through.

Shirring: Parallel rows of gathered stitches. Shirring can also be done with elastic thread.



Shrinkage: When the fabric or garment becomes smaller through laundering.

Slipstitch: A hand stitching method to join two folded edges almost invisibly by picking up just a couple threads of the fabric on each edge.



Sloper: A basic pattern usually sewn from muslin from which other patterns can be designed. A custom sloper is made to your specific measurements and can be used to design well fitting garments. See "Body Blueprint".

Stabilizer: A material used in sewing to hold fabric flat so it's more easily stitched. Interfacing is often used as a stabilizer.

Staystitching: A row of stitching around a curve used for keeping the curve from becoming distorted while sewing. Staystitching is done just inside the intended permanent stitching line.

Stitch In The Ditch: Stitching in the seam itself (the ditch) in order to hold it down.

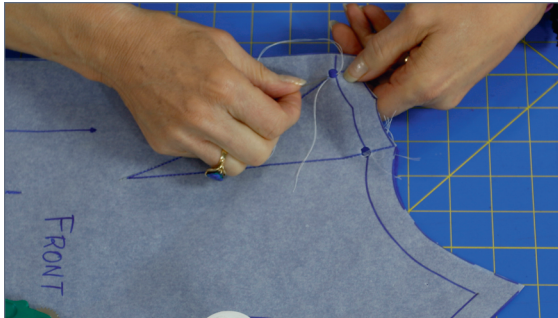
Straight of Grain Pattern Marking: A marking on that pattern that is to be lined up with the lengthwise grain of the fabric so that the garment hangs correctly when sewn.

Tack: Similar to basting. A hand sewing technique using a few stitches in one place to temporarily hold the fabric in place and then removed after final stitching.

Tailor's Chalk: A hard piece of chalk used for making marks on fabric.

Tailor's Ham: A tightly stuff ham shaped pillow used to press curved seams and darts. See "Pressing Ham".

Tailor's Tack: Using two threads in a needle which are drawn through fabric layers and then snipped, leaving tails of thread on top and on the bottom of the fabric for marking purposes.



Tension: The pressure placed on both the upper and lower threads while machine sewing.

Topstitch: Stitching done on the right side of the fabric for decorative and/or functional use. Usually sewn ¼" from the edge of a seam.

Trim: A general term including rick rack, lace, ribbon, fringe, cording, etc. used to embellish a garment.

Trimming: The act cutting away excess seam allowance or fabric with scissors.



Tuck: A narrow pleat sewn down the length of the fold, often done in rows. See "PinTuck".

Turn Out: Turning a project to the right side.

Twill Tape: A packaged cotton fabric tape made from a diagonal weave.

Underlining: Lining used to add body to a garment.

Understitch: Keeps a facing or lining from rolling onto the right side of a garment. After pressing the seam allowance and facing away from the garment, stitch through both with a scant 1/8" (0.3cm) from the seam. Grading the seam allowance and facing/lining prior to stitching may be necessary to eliminate bulk.

Velcro: The brand name for a common hook-and-loop type fastener.

Vent: The opening on the lower part of the back of a jacket or skirt that has a facing.

Walking Foot: A sewing machine foot used to guide several layers of fabric under the foot together as one unit. It prevents the fabrics from being pulled apart or shifting.

Woven: A type of fabric made by weaving on a loom.

Wrong Side: The inside or back of the fabric, not intended to be seen.

Yoke: Usually found at the neck or waist of a garment, the fitted piece that attaches to the hanging portion of the garment. Common in western wear.



Zigzag: A machine stitch sewn from side to side.

Zipper Foot: A sewing machine presser foot used to sew a zipper or other trims with raised edges.